



Cross Country Resource for Athletes, Coaches and Officials



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This Document is intended as a working guide for all coaches, officials and competitors. The initial revision is incomplete and it is intended as a live document that will be updated periodically.

XC Syllabus

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1) Introduction

Eventing is an exciting sport and arguably constitutes the most complete test of horse and rider. There is a degree of risk inherent in the sport and the Cross Country Test in particular. An understanding of the requirements of cross country and a sound training program for athlete and horse will assist in minimising that risk and increasing enjoyment.

This syllabus has been produced to better understand the discipline of Cross Country. We will work through specific areas and explain some key aspects of training for and riding Cross Country.

It is impossible to cover every eventuality in a single document and this document intended as an aid to, but not a substitute for, working with a qualified coach.

2) 15 most common rules for XC

Eventing in Australia is governed by a set of rules published on the Equestrian Australia website and we strongly recommend all competitors read the rules thoroughly, as it is your responsibility to know the rules when competing. Some of the most commonly used rules are published below.

- 1- 20 penalties for a first refusal on Cross Country and 40 penalties for a second at the same fence.
- 2- Elimination for a fall of Horse or rider. If the rider is riding multiple horses, the rider must get clearance from the medical team before riding other horses. Failure to do so will result in being issued with a Yellow Card.
- 3- If you have a stop at a 'B' element you do not have to jump the 'A' element on Cross Country but you may if you wish to.
- 4- If you ride a circle before a fence it does not incur 20 penalties if you had not presented to the fence. This does not apply if you are in the middle of a combination eg; and A and B element.
- 5- You incur 0.4 time faults per second over the optimum time on Cross Country
- 6- You incur 0.4 time faults per second from when you come in 20 seconds under the optimum time or less in CNC 80cm, 90cm, 105cm classes, 1* & 2*.
- 7- You must by the rules wear a Back Protector on Cross Country.
- 8- Excessive use of the whip (more than 3 times) is considered horse abuse
- 9- 3 refusals at one fence is elimination
- 10- 4 refusals over the entirety of the course is elimination (in the entry level competitions)
- 11- You are not permitted to jump any other fence on course other than your flagged section
- 12- If you fall anywhere on the competition grounds, even if you are just warming up you must be checked by the event medical service before remounting or leaving the venue. Failure to do so will result in being issued with a Yellow Card.
- 13- If you are eliminated for any reason you must take your horse to the vet check at the end of the cross country course.
- 14- If you are eliminated for any reason you must stop and leave the course

15- Over taking on cross country is permitted, but it must be done in a safe manner. Use your voice and wait until there is an area with no jumps. Likewise if you hear someone calling out, you need to pull to the side and let the rider pass you.

3) Levels and Dimensions of XC

Below is a table taken from the EA National rules which outline the specifications for each level for XC at CNC or CIC (One Day Events). Please note that in 2019 the tables will be changed to reflect the new class names.

Level	Distance		Efforts		Speed	Time	
	Min	Max	Min	Max		Min	Max
CNC							
EvA80	1500	2500	15	25	400	3'45"	6'15"
EvA95	2000	3000	15	25	450	4'26"	6'40"
EvA105	2000	3000	20	25	500	4'00"	6'00"

Level	Distance		Efforts		Speed	Time	
	Min	Max	Min	Max		Min	Max
1*/1.5*	2600	3120	25	30	520	5'00"	6'00"
2*/2.5*	3025	3575	27	32	550	5'30"	6'30"
3*	3420	3990	30	35	570	6'00"	7'00"

4) Speeds and Distances

The two most important items are:-

- 1- Speed- This is referring to Metres Per Minute. For an example 400mpm = 24kmph. The easiest way to become familiar with the different speeds is to set out 2 to 4 cones/buckets at 100m apart. For 400 mpm you would need to cover 200m in 30 seconds and so on through the table.
- 2- Distance – We tend to think of classes by their name EvA80 or EvA95, the height required to jump. Also the distance each horse needs to travel on the course increases as you move up the levels. When you look at the table you will realise how long you're out on course and also how fit your horse needs to be. A prepared and fit horse will find the track easier, and should stay more responsive to the rider throughout the course.

5) Fence Types

a) Vertical Fence

This is referring to a vertical fence with little or no ground line out on cross country (Figure a). Every fence on course needs to be respected, though a vertical fence in particular, due to

its upright nature. The reason for this is due the length of stride, speed you are travelling and the horse becoming longer and flatter in the gallop when travelling on course. The rider needs to sit the horse up and shorten the horses' stride prior to the final approach. The horse needs to be holding the shorter stride in balance and not wanting to increase the length. The rider then needs to maintain this stride length into the final approach, looking to meet the fence with a conventional distance, not a deeper distance.

The reason a deep distance is not desired is due to the vertical build type. This build is not as forgiving, though an important style of fence used by the course designer to steady the horses up on course after a long gallop or prior to curving lines for example. You would ride this fence in a similar style to the show jumping.



Figure a.

b) Open Rail Oxer

Open rail oxer meaning not closed in as a solid fence. The ride for this fence is not dissimilar to the Post and Rail fence above. The main difference is the width due to the inclusion of the back rail (Figure b).

Riders are to recognise that there is the need for more energy and length of stride to cover the width of the jump. The common failing is not recognising the importance of the front of the oxer as they tend to be quite vertical. This requires the rider to sit the horse up and shorten the stride prior to the final approach of the fence. The horse is to maintain this canter in their own balance, not wanting to lean in the riders' hands or become longer. Leading into the final approach the rider needs to meet the fence with a conventional distance, not a deeper distance.



Figure b.

c) Apex (Corner)

The apex (corner) is a precision fence. It requires accurate riding good training, with the horse straight and between the rider's aids. Due to the build of the fence, an uncommitted horse and rider may have a run-out at this type of obstacle. It is best practice that the rider uses their aids to "block" the horse from running out to the side, with a strong contact to prevent the shoulders from shifting across and a supporting leg to keep the horse straight and forward.

An apex is a triangular shape where the horse jumps over one side of the triangle (Figure c). The jump makes a 'V' shape and the horse is expected to jump as close to the point as possible without the risk of running out. Through the higher levels, the apex becomes wider and the face of the fence becomes narrower, which tests the accuracy of the rider to place the horse and also the honesty of the horse to jump close to the point.

This concept requires training from the beginner level initially and then gradually intensifying the apex dimensions and adding obstacles before and after to better understand the concept. A common failing with this fence is when introducing the concept at 65cm or 80cm, treating it as any other fence and not identifying the skills required and from this point

believing the horse knows the concept. At lower levels the apex is low in height, not wide and has a long face to it. It's important to jump them at these levels, knowing how and the skills needed in order to jump them is often missing without being coached through it.



Figure c.

d) Ditch

This is basically a hole in the ground which is clearly defined at the front and the back so the horse can see a start and finish point. (figure d). Ditches can be incorporated into other fences such as a trakehner and a bull finch / ditch and brush / ditch palisade.

This fence needs to be ridden positively with a good connection through the riders' aids, especially a good strong contact leading up to the fence. This type of fence needs to be ridden accurately by placing the horse as close to the base of the fence as possible to make the jumping effort as small as possible. The trakehner is the only one where the distance needed for the fence would vary according to the design of the fence eg; a straight or angled rail on to the ditch and the degree of the angle, also how much ditch is in front and behind the trakehner rail, (figure e).

A common failing for this open ditch fence is allowing the horse to continue in the gallop on cross country heading towards the fence, without balancing the horse. Then the rider moves up to the fence increasing the length of canter even more, without balancing the horse and placing them to the best distance close to the edge. This doesn't allow the horse to see the fence or know it's coming up, therefore jumping the fence awkwardly. Less experienced horses aren't use to sighting the ditch, therefore its essential the horse is balanced and

prepared prior to the fence. Making every fence you jump a confidence building one so they understand the concept not merely survive it.

With the ditch and brush/trakehners the horse can see a fence in the distance. As this type of fence can be a rider scary fence, it's common for the rider to approach with speed which allows the horse to be long and flat. This fence needs impulsion and also a good connection and a balanced horse. From this balanced connected horse, the rider is then to maintain or gently move up to the desired distance.



Figure d.



Figure e.

e) Water

Water fences are one of the key elements for cross country; they range in difficulty from a splash through the water to a drop in, a fence and drop in also to a fence in the water. The understanding of water is not just getting the horse confidently going through or jumping in but understanding how the challenges of water itself implicate our ride, to, in and through this type of fence.

The first step is to get your horse confident to get into the water; from this point traditionally steps are used in and out of the water along with obstacles at the edge of the water including a drop in. Accuracy fences in the water itself such as an apex or narrow are introduced in higher levels, though they are evident in all levels usually positioned as you leave the water or after a step out with a related distance.

When in the water, it creates a drag on the horse and affects the length of the horse's stride; once in the water you need a lot more impulsion to maintain any pace in the water. This needs to be taken into consideration when walking distances to fences from the water.

Before tackling the jump into water, it is good practice to work on drop fences alone without the water concept so the horse has an understanding and confidence in what to do. Moving onto fences and drops into water, the rider must be prepared to have a defensive position by staying tall with eyes up and a secure lower leg for the landing into the water and the first stride which is nearly always shortened and losing energy. All of these things combined contribute to a break in rhythm and downwards force for horse and rider on the landing which can result in the rider becoming unbalanced and losing their position or even falling off. (figure f)



Figure f.

f) Skinny / arrow heads

In cross country, skinnies and arrow head type of fences are being used more often and not just singularly. As the levels increase you can see them being used in combinations of 2 or 3 of them in a row in both straight and curved lines. Arrow heads are narrow obstacles designed to test the accuracy from the rider and also the honesty of the horse to stay on the line and jump the skinny fence, not unlike the apex. It's essential the rider connects the horse between their aids and maintains this with a strong contact leading to the skinny

Teaching a horse to lock onto a narrow obstacle is crucial in the current day of eventing. A good way to begin is to use a barrel on its side with a rail off each end to help the horse look at the middle of the barrel as the point to jump. Once a horse becomes familiar with the concept then you can move to narrow fences on cross country. It can be useful to use poles off the side of the fences when schooling, if your horse is new to the narrow fence concept, also flags on the fences can help to direct the horse to the middle. It is important to be accurate to a skinny by placing the horse close to the base of the jump to make the question very clear.

When these fences are used in related lines, especially as the second element, this puts more pressure on the rider being able to produce the appropriate size canter and balance at the first element in order to have balance and control to the skinny.

Common failing for skinny fences is where the rider doesn't balance the horse prior to the fence, this impacts the ability to ride the desired distance, a distance away from the base makes the fence a much bigger question and easier for the horse to run out to the side. This is a habit we do not want the horse to become familiar with, as it's a very hard one to break if ever (figure g).



Figure g.

g) Banks and Drops

Drop fences are important to become competent with as you can see them in steps, banks, drops into water. The severity of a step can easily be influenced by the undulation of the ground, multiple of steps, the approach to the step and also the type of fence on top of it.

The first thing with drops is to get your horse to literally drop off the step/bank. As the levels increase, accuracy fences such as apex's and Skinny's are used in related lines after drop fences. This is why teaching your horse to drop off is essential, as this will give you a consistent landing distance mostly within the 6'0" allowance set by the course designer. This also puts your horse in the best position to land in balance and be able to meet the regulated strides to get to the next fence.

The rider needs to keep a tall position with their upper body, keeping the eyes up and an allowing hand, even opening their fingers to allow the reins to slip through their fingers in order to let the horse to stretch their neck whilst they drop down.

A good practice is to start with a small step, approach the step at the walk, balance the horse before the edge and encourage the horse to take its time, allow the horse to square their hind legs up at the edge, lower its body by bending its hocks, then stepping off. If you feel the horse doesn't care too much and isn't doing what is suggested above, then move up to a bigger step if needed.

Banks are where you need to jump up a step then go across and drop or jump off the other side. With jumping up a bank, it's important to have the horse in a shorter and active stride, in an uphill balance ready to jump up the bank. Keeping the horse balanced on top in either trot or canter ready to drop or jump off.

A common failing, especially when these types of fences are later in the course is where the rider doesn't get the horse shorter and more active prior to the final approach to the step up. This has the horse in a longer/flat balance which is the opposite balance the horse needs to jump up. The horse may jump up, though usually land unbalanced on top and then skip off the step again out of balance. This adds risk to the horse tripping/stalling on landing and the rider losing balance and possibly falling off (figure h).



Figure h.

6) Curving lines v's Straight lines

One thing in common with curving and straight related lines is the importance of producing the exact ride needed for the first element as this will give you the best chance with a horse in a consistent stride, in balance to meet the regulated strides set to the second element.

On straight related lines, the importance is as above, getting the first element with the appropriate stride length and distance, then keeping the horse between the riders' aids and guiding them straight on the line to the second element. There is no opportunity to ride a tighter or wider line in order to give you less or more room as it's a straight line.

For curved related lines, there are generally 3 options, to ride on the regulated line, ride outside the regulated line or ride inside the regulated line. This is where you need to know your horse well, how well does your horse turn each way, does your horse travel more comfortably on a shorter or longer stride compared to regulated? All of this, needs to be considered whilst making your decision for your line.

A common failing is where the rider isn't able to produce the desired approach and distance to the first element, which directly impacts their ability to meet the regulated strides in the related line. On a curving line, this would make it near impossible to fulfil the desired line.

7) Footing

Eventing events are conducted across the country in all different areas and at different times of the year, this leads to differing types of going. Each area is known for certain types of footing, some are sandy soil, some are usually hard and some are quite soft and even deep.

If you have entered an event and you arrive and the footing is not what you normally use to riding on, then have a think of the difference. Is it harder, softer, slippery or even just wet? All these differing types of going can affect your horses' ability to get the job done with sure footing like they normally would.

Harder – Your horse could feel awkward on tight turns, unwilling to gallop freely. Post event your horse could pull up a little stiff and sore from the concussion of the hard going

Softer/Deep – Your horse may feel like they are struggling to travel normally, almost like they are being sucked back, they may feel unwilling to move up to distances to fences, they may also start to lose confidence in jumping as the ground is becoming deeper. Post event the risk is tendon, ligament and muscle strain.

Slippery/Wet – Your horse might find it difficult to ride normal turns at speed when it's slippery, they begin to lose footing by slipping both in front and behind, this also leads to losing confidence in the footing and the horse beginning to slow down and not want to go forward, also not jumping confidently.

The most important connection between all of the above is to recognise if your horse begins to change uncharacteristically and what you do with that information. Steadying up a little

giving the horse more time to re balance, take turns and adjust strides which will give them confidence where they are seeming to lose it.

8) Undulation

Courses vary from flat to hills, and slightly undulating. All of these little rises and slopes are unique to each venue and the course designer will use these to place fences on course in order to make fences more influential, to flow better and add more complexity to the course. As a rider, it's important to notice the slight undulations as well as the big ones.

The little undulations can affect your ability to meet a fence in balance or even in the stride you saw if you haven't thought of how it would affect your approach or departure. When there are undulations it's important to have your horse balanced and between the riders' aids for added support through the dips whilst focussing on the element ahead.

9) Surrounding Environment

As a rule, we as competitors tend to ride on our own or at a facility with people you are use to having around. Your day to day training is fairly consistent and familiar to you and your horse.

When we compete we are suddenly surrounded by unfamiliar people, horses, venue, atmosphere and stress, these can be a huge distraction and can also make you feel anxious and not good enough. Don't be fooled as your horse would most certainly be feeling the same way.

It's important at that moment you try to keep things the same as you would at home. The familiarity of the work you do at home will relax the horse and get them to begin to listen to you and not focus on the atmosphere around them. This will also work for the rider too. We all want to be better, though the competition environment is not the place to change things; you are consolidating your work from home!

10) Minute Markers

Minute markers are very useful to use whilst out on cross country to help you meet the optimum time without incurring penalties for coming in too fast or too slow.

To work out minute markers you need to look at the course map and find out how many meters per minute (MPM) you need to travel at for your level. Then you get a measuring wheel or download one of the cross country apps and get measuring. At each minute, be sure to write down a prominent object that will be there when you are on course to look out for to remind you of the minute marker. There is a lot to think about whilst out on course, but it's just another thing that practice makes perfect.

11) Recommended Gear for Horse

Using some form of Cross Country boots on your horses' legs is recommended for this phase. For post cross country it is important that you have cooling down equipment ready to be used at the end of Cross Country. Cooling down equipment consists of a couple of buckets, sponges and scrapers. Fill water in the buckets ready to sponge and scrape off the horse in the vet check.

12) Studs

These are devices that are screwed into holes in your horses' shoes. They are designed to increase the grip in wet or slippery conditions. There are many types of studs available on the market. If you require more information about studs, and when and how to use them, you should speak to your coach.



Hunting & Hacking Stud Plugs

13) Recommended Gear for Rider

It is a requirement that a back protector is worn. A back protector of Beta 3 standard, ASTM standard F1937 or equivalent is recommended for riders to use on this phase. Leading eventing riders all use a level 3 back protector.

14) MER's

MER's what is it? It stands for Minimum Eligibility Requirement. These MER's are required at all levels, you need to obtain a certain amount per level before you are able to move up to the next level.

An MER is obtaining the following at a competition;

- 55% or better in the Dressage

- Clear Cross Country with no more than 30 time penalties
- No more than 16 Show Jumping penalties.

We need to remember that it's the minimum requirement needed before you upgrade to the next level. It's good practice to do an additional 3 MER's on top of the requirement. A good guide is whether you are competitive at your level? If not then it's possibly best to stay at the level until you can be more competitive which will make you more skilled and practised as a partnership before moving up. It's a win win!

15) TD's and Rider Representatives

Technical Delegates (TD'S) are just one of the many officials that make up the officials team at eventing events. The role of a TD is to make sure that the event is meeting the rules and regulations set by the National Body, Equestrian Australia or the FEI, also that the riders do too. Not a small task!

The TD is also the sounding board / conduit between the event organisers, ground jury members and the riders. They are there to help, although often very busy, they are the one official you can seek out to ask any rule question or query you have about the Cross Country or Show Jumping courses. It's important to remember to get your questions to them in a timely manner so they can hopefully act on it in time.

The Riders Representative is a rider that has been asked by the Event or TD in advance if they would be happy to be this person for the class they have entered. This role is there so that riders from that class have a go to person for any of the questions you might have regarding the Cross Country or Show Jumping courses. The riders Rep then takes all concerns to the TD in time for them to act on the queries. If your event has rider Reps, they will advertise who they are and that persons' number on the notice board at the Event Secretaries office.

16) Yellow Cards and Verbal Warnings

As you may know Equestrian Australia is putting significant effort into reducing the risk associated with riding cross country. One of the key contributors to risk is the competency of horse and rider. Yellow cards and verbal warnings are part of a system of sanctions designed to advise riders when the behaviour of the horse and rider is considered dangerous and thus help the rider become aware of this and make modifications accordingly

17) Goal Setting / When to call it a day

Goal setting is a fantastic tool which allows you to look at the whole calendar and earmark the pinnacle event at the end of the season, then putting in enough lead up events in order to become qualified and able to compete at this event.

The talent in goal setting is the ability to recognise when it's not going to plan and amending this plan to help keep your horse confident. Sometimes the greatest plans to come through

with the goods is not what is needed or working out. The rider recognising this and not letting the dream of where they hoped to be, get in the way of the horse being able to stay confident and learn at the rate they need to. It's disappointing when we can't reach our goal in the set time we had planned it, though the show will always go on and there is most certainly always another event next time.

This skill is also important to develop at each event when your horse is not responding normally or uncharacteristically and you the rider being able to determine this and act on it quickly. As mentioned above there is always another event, even though your heart was set on that one, in the interest of you and your horse its' best to call it a day, go home and consolidate the area it was struggling with and have a go at the next event.

18) Summary

Riding Cross Country is an exciting and important part of eventing- the required combination of fences, terrain, footing and fitness necessitates a specific training program for this phase. It can be difficult to access the time and facilities required to do this training but it is a key component to reducing your risk, and increasing enjoyment and performance. Seeking support from Accredited EA Coaches or even contacting your state body to inquire about specialised Eventing training days is a good start.